

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 590

INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

DIA WASHDC

USCINSCO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 3476

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, BL

SUBJ: PEACEFUL MAY DAY WEEKEND IN LA PAZ

1. SUMMARY: DESPITE CONCERN ABOUT POSSIBLE VIOLENCE FROM BOTH THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT BOLIVIA'S MAY DAY WEEKEND PASSED QUIETLY. FOUR TO FIVE THOUSAND TRADE UNIONISTS PEACEFULLY MARCHED THROUGH THE STREETS OF LA PAZ ON MAY DAY, ENDING UP BEFORE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE MINERS' UNION FOR A SERIES OF SPEECHES, NOTABLY MOSTLY FOR THEIR MILD TREATMENT OF THE GOB. MINEWORKERS FEDERATION LEADER JUAN LECHIN OQUENDO DID NOT APPEAR, CLAIMING ILLNESS. HERNAN SILES ZUAZO, WHOSE FOLLOWERS PARTICIPATED IN THE MAY DAY PARADE, FORMALLY LAUNCHED HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ON APRIL 28 BEFORE AN ENTHUSIASTIC CROWD OF 5,000 SUPPORTERS. LA PAZ' UNIVERSITY OF SAN ANDRES REMAINS CLOSED AND NO DATE HAS BEEN SET FOR ITS REOPENING, BUT NO INCIDENTS OF STUDENT VIOLENCE HAVE OCCURRED, ALTHOUGH ONE STUDENT HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. THE PEACEFUL PASSING OF MAY DAY IS AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN PROGRESS TOWARDS JULY ELECTIONS, DEMONSTRATING THAT

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THE LEFTIST OPPOSITION, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT, WANTS TO AVOID GIVING THE GOB AN EXCUSE TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS. MOREOVER, THE GOVERNMENT'S BENIGN HANDLING OF THE UNIVERSITY SITUATION AND THE MAY DAY EVENTS IS A POSITIVE SIGN THAT THE GOB AS WELL INTENDS TO AVOID JEOPARDIZING PEACEFUL PROGRESS TOWARD THE JULY ELECTIONS

END SUMMARY.

2. THE MAY DAY WEEKEND PASSED QUIETLY IN LA PAZ DESPITE A REPORT THAT CIVILIAN-CLAD SOLIDERS MIGHT TRY TO BREAK UP THE FORMAL LAUNCHING OF SILES ZUAZO'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN AND DESPITE FEARS THAT THE FIRST MAY DAY PARADE SINCE 1971, COMING JUST THREE DAYS AFTER THE GOB CLOSED THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN ANDRES IN LA PAZ, MIGHT RESULT IN VIOLENCE. APPROXIMATELY 4-5,000 TRADE UNIONISTS, A SMALL TURNOUT COMPARED TO THE PARADES OF THE OVANDO/TORRES PERIOD, MARCHED THROUGH DOWNTOWN LA PAZ FOR ABOUT 90 MINUTES AND THEN ASSEMBLED BEFORE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE MINERS' FEDERATION AND THE BOLIVIAN LABOR CENTRAL (COB). THE MARCHERS, NEATLY DRESSED IN JACKETS AND TIES, WERE IN A GOOD HUMOR AS THEY PEACEFULLY MARCHED THROUGH LA PAZ. WHEN THEY PASSED THE US EMBASSY SOME SHOUTED "OUT WITH YANKEE IMPERIALISM", BUT GENERALLY THEIR MILITANCY WAS RELATIVELY MILD. MOST OF THE SPEECHES DEALT WITH THE NEED FOR UNITY OF THE WORKING CLASS AND ATTACKED "FASCISM" IN GENERAL, BUT THERE WERE FEW SPECIFIC ATTACKS AGAINST THE GOB, PRESIDENT BANZER, MINISTER OF LABOR VARGAS OR THE U.S. MINERS' FEDERATION AND COB LEADER JUAN LECHIN WAS DUE TO SPEAK BUT IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS ILL. CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ASSEMBLY FATHER JULIO TUMIRI GAVE ONE OF THE STRONGEST SPEECHES IN SUPPORT OF THE WORKING CLASS. MEANWHILE, IN AN APPARENT EFFORT TO ATTRACT SOME OF THE LA PAZ FACTORY WORKERS AWAY FROM THE PARADE, PRESIDENT BANZER AND MINISTER OF LABOR VARGAS DEDICATED A RECREATION COMPLEX BELONGING TO THE FEDERATION OF LA PAZ FACTORY WORKERS.

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3. HERNAN SILES ZUAZO FORMERLY LAUNCHED HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN THE EVENING OF APRIL 28 BEFORE A CROWD OF APPROXIMATELY 5,000 PARTISANS. THE "PROCLAMATION" TOOK PLACE NEAR DOWNTOWN LA PAZ, IN A SQUARE WHERE SIGNIFICANT FIGHTING HAD TAKEN PLACE DURING THE 1952 REVOLUTION. THERE APPEARED TO BE ABOUT AS MANY PEOPLE IN ATTENDANCE AT THE SILES PROCLAMATION AS THERE HAD BEEN AT PEREDA'S ON DECEMBER 16 (SEE 77 LA PAZ 10102), BUT SILES' PARTISANS WERE FAR MORE ENTHUSIASTIC.

4. SILES WAS PROCLAIMED BY A COALITION CONSISTING OF HIS OWN MNRI, THE SOCIALIST PARTY, THE COMMUNIST PARTY (MOSCOW BRANCH), THE MIR AND THE SMALL MIN. IN HIS UNEMOTIONAL 25 MINUTE SPEECH SILES ATTACKED THE NEW OLIGARCHY WHICH HAD MADE THE COUNTRY MORE DEPENDENT ON "IMPERIALISM". HE CHARACTERIZED THE BANZER ADMINISTRATION AS AN "ARROGANT DICTATORSHIP" AND STATED THAT, "IF, AS IN 1952, THE OLIGARCHY TRIES TO STEAL THE ELECTION THEN "THE PEOPLE WILL HAVE TO RESCUE ITS RIGHT TO GOVERN ITSELF AS IT DID IN THE 1952 REVOLUTION."

5. THE SITATUION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN ANDRES IN LA PAZ REMAINED QUIET OVER THE WEEKEND ALTHOUGH ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS ONE TUDENT HAS BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. THE LEFTIST

STUDENTS WHO SEIZED THE UNIVERSITY ON APRIL 27 HAVE THUS FAR FAILED TO PUT UP ANY SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION TO THE GOB'S DECISION TO CLOSE THE UNIVERSITY. MEANWHILE, THE PRINCIPAL CONCERN FOR THE GREAT MAJORITY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS APPEARS TO BE HOW TO FEED THEMSELVES NOW THAT THE UNIVERSITY DINING ROOM HAS BEEN CLOSED DOWN.

6. THE GOB ISSUED A DECLARATION ON APRIL 29 DEPLORING THE STUDENTS' ACTIONS WHICH HAD LED THE GOB TO "TEMPORARILY" CLOSE THE UNIVERSITY "UNTIL THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ATTITUDES OF POLITICAL GROUPS AND AGITATORS ARE OVERCOME." HOWEVER, IN AN APPARENT CONCILIATORY GESTURE TO THE STUDENT DEMAND FOR UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY, THE GOB STATEMENT SAID THAT ONCE THE UNIVERSITY IS REOPENED THE AUTHORITIES SHOULD EXPEDITE THE

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"REORGANIZATION" OF THE UNIVERSITY AND RESPECT THE RESULTS OF AN ELECTION TO BE HELD IN WHICH ALL THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WILL PARTICIPATE. UNIVERSITY RECOTR SAHONERO HAS TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT NO DATE HAS BEEN SET FOR THE UNIVERSITY'S REOPENING.

7. COMMENT: MANY OBSERVERS HAD BEEN CONCERNED THAT THE LABOR UNIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE CONTROLLED BY THE LEFT, I.E. THE URBAN TEACHERS AND THE MINERS, MIGHT TRY TO CAPITALIZE ON MAY DAY TO ATTACK THE BANZER ADMINISTRATION AND LAUNCH THEIR DEMANDS FOR LARGE WAGE INCREASES. VILENCE WAS CONSIDERED A POSSIBILITY. HOWEVER, THE PEACEFUL NATURE OF THE LABOR DEMONSTRATION INDICATES THAT, AT LEAST FOR NOW, LABOR INTENDS TO AVOID GIVING THE GOB AN EXCUSE TO POSTPONE OR CANCEL THE ELECTION PROCESS. THE GOVERNMENT'S OWN BENIGN HANDLING OF THE UNIVERSITY SITUATION AND THE MAY DAY EVENTS IS A POSITIVE SIGNAL THAT THE GOB ALSO INTENDS TO AVOID JEOPARDIZING A PEACEFUL ELECTION PROCESS. THE ARMED FORCES CHIEFS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR MAY 2 THAT THEY WERE ENCOURAGED BY THE PEACEFUL NATURE OF THE MAY DAY PARADE AND THEY SAW THIS AS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE TOWARD THE JULY ELECTIONS.

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